



Len Laver circa 1935 (SLWA MN1640 5053A13)

Leonard Courtney Laver (1917-1943) was born 17 February 1917 at Midland Junction to parents Charles William (1863–1937) and Edith Beatrice nee Attewell Laver (1885–1951). ‘Len’ Laver had siblings Arthur John b.1905, Sheila Eugenie b.1907, Jack Charles b.1910, Elizabeth Patricia b.1911, and Frank Major b.1915.

From a large and unusually talented family, Len’s father Charles was born in Victoria and moved to Western Australia in the 1880s, where he became a drover and took up a pastoral lease near Halls Creek before returning to Victoria to attend the medical school at the University of Melbourne from 1887 to 1891. Charles went to Great Britain for a post-graduate course and obtained further medical degrees at Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1894.

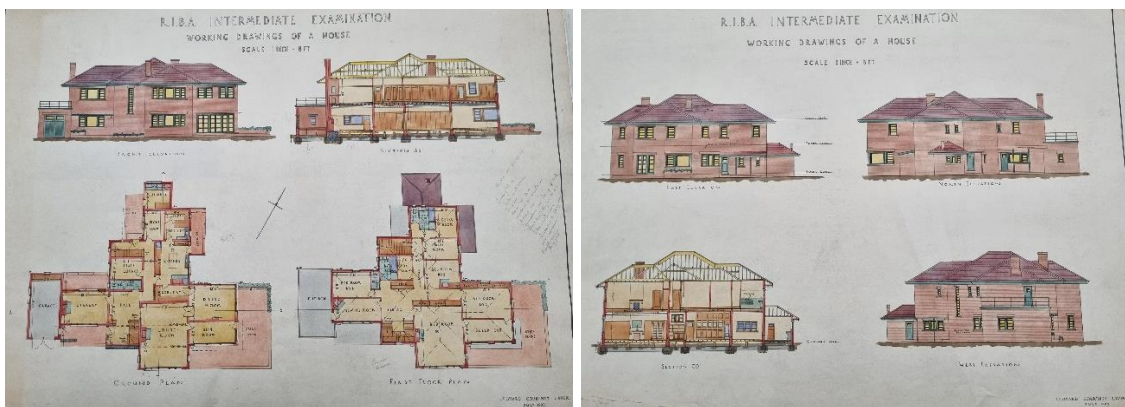


Sculpture in memory of Charles Laver at Don Leahy Memorial Park, MacPherson Place, Laverton placed in 2000 (2016 photo monumentaustralia.org.au)

Lured by gold he returned to Western Australia for the life of a prospector. Laver travelled over 400km by bicycle to the Mount Margaret area where he began a long association with the British Flag mine and surrounding area. In 1900 the town British Flag was renamed Laverton in his honor. Charles had moderate success with mining and other ventures. In 1902 he voyaged to England to gather support for his mining activities, and there met and married Edith Attewell in 1904. They returned to Laverton where Laver became medical officer. ‘Mr the Doctor’ was well respected over the goldfields, living with his wife and children at Wellington Mill c.1909, Kalgoorlie, Kanowna 1914-1915, Midland Junction 1916-1918, and then at *Bonnie Doon*, 18 Brookman Street, Kalgoorlie from May 1920.

Len commenced his education at the Kalgoorlie Infants School, moving through the State system into the Kalgoorlie Central School, and then Eastern Goldfields High School from 1930 to 1934, where he attained his Junior and Leaving Certificates. In 1934 he was as school prefect and captain of the school.

In March of 1935 Len became an articled student under the elderly Alfred Wright (1861-1939) at the T&G Building in St George's Terrace Perth. The indenture signed by Charles Laver, Len Laver and Alfred Wright set out the terms where Wright would teach and instruct Len for three years, for which Charles paid the sum of £250 to Wright. Len was admitted as a student member of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) in May 1935. Writing to Charles Laver in July 1936, Wright noted Len's excellent progress and that: *It was a great satisfaction to me that he showed his pluck in wishing to study for the Royal Institute of British Architects [RIBA] associateship examinations ...*



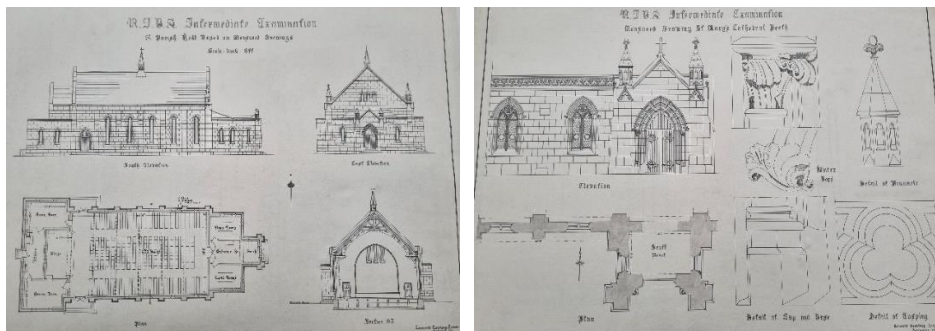
Laver's 1937 drawings of a house for the RIBA Intermediate Examination (SLWA 5053A/12/5-6)

Len spent all of his articles as a member of the Architectural Association of WA, acting as Honorary Secretary and a sub-editor of its journal. Living at the University of Western Australia (UWA) St George's College, he attended evening lectures for students at UWA (some given by Wright), and also the design class under the brilliant architect William Leighton (1905-1990) in 1937. Leighton described Laver to Wright as one of the four best pupils in a class of twenty-three. Charles Laver died in May 1937, and was survived by his wife and the six children. Writing to Edith Laver in July 1937, Wright reported that: *Leonard is getting on well. Mr Duncan, the architect next door to me, got him to draw sketches & then the working drawings for a fire-station at Kalgoorlie, which he did, and Duncan made only unimportant corrections.'*



Laver's 1937 sketches of the Jewish Memorial and Perth City from King's Park; and an unnamed watercolour painting (SLWA 5053A/9; 5053A/12/19)

Edith Laver and the daughters Sheila and 'Betty' moved to Victoria to be closer to other family, living at East Melbourne from November 1937, and Len continued on at Perth. Wright certified that Len had successfully completed the terms of his articles in March 1938. With regard to the RIBA Intermediate Examination, on 16 December 1938 Len was able to send a telegram to his mother in Melbourne: 'Passed exam with distinction, Love Leonard'.

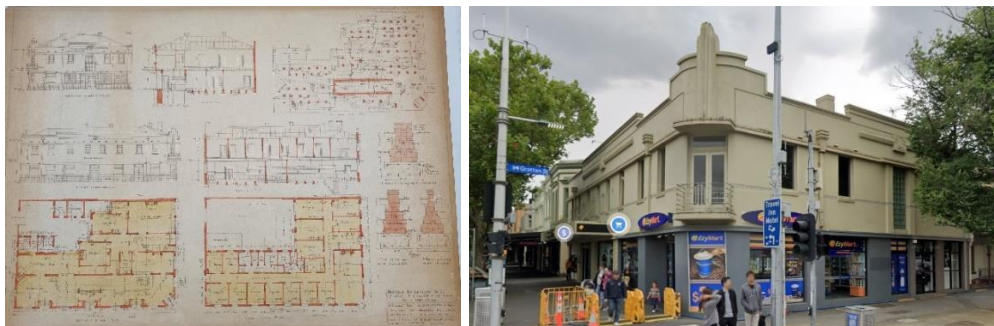


Laver's 1937 measured drawings of a Parish Hall and a portion of St Mary's Cathedral Perth for the RIBA Intermediate Examination (SLWA 5053A/12/9; SLWA 5053A/12/3)

Armed with excellent references from prominent members of the WA architectural profession in Reg Summerhayes, Edgar Le.B. Henderson, Bill Leighton and Alfred Wright, Len moved to Victoria and enrolled at Melbourne University in the first year of the Diploma of Architecture course in 1939, whilst working for the architect D.F. Cowell Ham at 190 Bourke Street in Melbourne.

With the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), Len made an application to join air crew in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in December 1939. His elder brother Jack, a doctor, also joined the RAAF. Later in 1940 Cowell Ham provided a glowing reference for Len which includes recognition of his work in 1939-1940: *Mr Laver has been with me for a period of two years, during which time he has been employed on the design and construction of various classes of building, including hotels, residences and has assisted me on*

the drawings for the additions to the Springvale Crematorium. ... Mr Laver left me of his own free will to enter the fighting services of this country. ...



Len Laver's drawing for a University Hotel corner Lygon and Grattan Streets Melbourne, for D.F. Cowell Ham Architect and Engineer, 5 August 1939 (SLWA 5053A/12/18; Google 2022)

Len formally enlisted for Second World War service at Melbourne in February 1940. He listed his next of kin as his mother, with whom he was living at Flat 2, Powlett Mansions, 69 Powlett Street East Melbourne. In July 1940 he commenced training at the No.2 Initial Training School (ITS) at Bradfield Park in Sydney. The twenty-three year old was noted as being six foot tall, weighing 12 stone, that he played cricket, tennis, football and golf. The No. 2 ITS was formed as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. New recruits were posted to an Initial Training School to learn the basics of military life. They were also taught subjects such as mathematics, navigation and aerodynamics. He then progressed to flying training at the No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School, Narromine, NSW. On 29 November 1940 Len embarked from Sydney for further training in Canada. He graduated from the Flying Training Course at Calgary, Alberta in April 1941, and was transferred to Great Britain in May 1941. Illustrating the perilous life of aircrew in England, in May 1942 Len was piloting a Wellington bomber taking-off at 11.30 at night when a tyre burst and the plane swerved, hitting another Wellington, which burst into flames. The fire spread quickly to Len's plane, and despite a 'marvellous escape' of all the crew, he was badly injured, spending some time in hospital, and then a convalescent home near Liverpool.

Len was posted with the RAAF in the Middle East from October 1942, and died in action on 8 January 1943. A post-war newspaper report provides some details of the loss: *Details have recently been received by his family of the death of Warrant-Officer Leonard Courtney Laver, pilot of a Wellington bomber, 458 Squadron, who lost his life in air operations from Malta on January 8, 1943. ...*

After operations over Europe, Warrant-officer Laver was transferred to the Middle East. It was whilst engaged in torpedo bombing of enemy shipping that he lost his life. He is now known to be buried in the British cemetery at Catania, Sicily.

Edith Laver died 20 October 1951 at Melbourne. Kindergarten teachers Sheila and Elizabeth returned to Kalgoorlie in 1979, they bought a house at 141 Collins Street the following year, where they spent their retirement years. They donated a large volume of family papers to the Battye Library of WA, allowing us a great understanding of their family and of Len Laver's short but promising architectural career. Len Laver, Osborne Kirkton Fisher (1913-1941, former pupil of Wright, died flying), Ernest William Grigg (1917-1942, died New Guinea), Harry Wraith Downes (1918-1943, former pupil of H. Boas, died POW Singapore), John Henry Stubbs (1918-1942, PWD cadet, died flying out of Malta), and Michael Courthorpe Haynes (1920-1942, PWD cadet, died flying) were all younger members of the WA architectural profession whose lives were cut short by the horrors of the Second World War. In 1943 Zoie Bennett lost her husband John Fryer (RAAF), and Vida Wright's fiancé Bill Philippson was killed in New Guinea.



The Design Class at UWA Crawley, with Bill Leighton standing front left; and editorial staff for the Architectural Association's *Tee Square Journal* of 1937 (pp.22, 27). Of the four staff shown, only Arnold Camerer, unable to serve due to medical issues, survived the Second World War.

References:

'Dr Charles Laver Dead', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 15 May 1937, p.1.

'Obituary - Warrant Officer L.C. Laver', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 8 January 1947, p.3.

Laver, Leonard Courtney, SLWA MN1640.

Laver Family, SLWA MN1782.

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